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ABSTRACT

Two public hearings on the implementation of the federal Child Care and Development Block Grant in California are summarized. Over 200 testimonies were either received by the state's Child Development Programs Advisory Committee or presented during the hearings. In spite of the diverse demographic representation, the variety of viewpoints and service needs, and the broad range of program providers represented at the hearings, there was a general commonality of concerns, complaints, desires, and suggestions regarding the future of California's child care and the role of federal funds. There were several recurring themes in comments concerning both the direct service and quality care provisions in the federal legislation. Recurrent direct service issues concerned: (1) the lead agency; (2) local planning; (3) service expansion; (4) infant care; (5) school-age care; (6) early childhood education programs; (7) children with exceptional needs; (8) abused, neglected, or at-risk children; (9) teen parents; (10) parental choice and alternative payment programs; (11) multilingual and multicultural programs; (12) geographic equity; (13) ties to quality; and (14) ties to Title IV-A funding. Recurrent issues regarding quality of care concerned staff training and development; staff salaries and benefits; maintenance of quality standards in subsidized programs; resource and referral augmentation; and parent education and training. Plans for future hearings on California's state plan are discussed. (GLR)

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Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant

Summary of California's Public Hearings April 3 - Sacramento & April 16 - Los Angeles

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SUMMARY OF THE PUBLIC HEARINGS ON THE FEDERAL CHILD CARE AND DEVELOPMENT BLOCK GRANT

Prepared by the Child Development Programs Advisory Committee

May 13, 1991

The Child Development Programs Advisory Committee, in coordination with the Governor's Secretary of Child Development and Education, the Department of Education, and the Department of Social Services, has recently completed two public hearings on the implementation of the new Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant. Considering the diverse demographic representation, the diversity of view point and service needs, and the broad range of program providers represented at these hearings, it is worth noting there remained a general commonality of concern, complaint, desire and suggestions regarding the future of California's child care and the role the federal funds could play in shaping that future. Funding for the hearings was provided by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

Though the order and content of the presentations varied, there were several recurring themes as speakers commented on both the direct service and quality care provisions in the federal legislation.

DIRECT SERVICES

Lead Agency

Approximately 25% of the participants discussed a lead agency. Of the 25%, there was almost universal support for appointing the California Department of Education (CDE) as the lead agency for the implementation of the Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant. Several reasons were given including: (1) CDE is already administering over \$350 million in contracts; (2) the CDE system would need only minor augmentations to accommodate Federal requirements; and, (3) CDE's demonstrated commitment to quality and parental choice.

Local Planning

Both verbal and written testimonies requested a stronger role for local planning. Typical comments included "We recommend that localities be allowed to designate additional priority populations for these funds and/or the at-risk-of-welfare funds, especially after-school care and teen parent programs" suggested Kim Thomas-Dozier from Napa.

The discussions called for a broad-based partnership, a collaboration between local government, school districts, community organizations, state

programs, Head Start, private providers and the business community. Local needs vary. Priorities for needed services are best assessed at the local level, suggested Cliff Marcussen from Options. "Involving local government and private organizations in identifying the needs for local planning areas is an excellent addition to our existing system".

Service Expansion

Many of the participants spoke of the need to expand services in several areas. The current waiting lists for subsidized care were a recurring concern of those testifying. For example, parents of Head Start children expressed their satisfaction with the program's content, but they also expressed their frustration with the lack of full day service. Several of these parents noted their willingness and motivation to seek the training and education necessary to leave the welfare rolls, but pointed out the lack of child care ties them to public support. Many of these parents were on waiting lists for subsidized care. Without access to this care, they see no path to joining the workforce.

Pamela Dodd, Executive Director of the Los Angeles Child Care and Development Council, Inc., summed up the need for an expansion of direct services with the following, "The absence of affordable child care is possibly the single most critical factor preventing poverty low-income parents from overcoming dependency and entering the work force." Ms. Dodd noted a pressing need for after-school care and full-time early childhood development care. Noting her agency had qualified income eligible parents on waiting lists for up to three years, she remarked, "Subsidized, affordable, quality child care empowers parents to become independent and change the poverty cycle of ongoing generations by allowing parents to attend vocational training, seek employment and obtain work."

Infant Care

The lack of infant care was described as a pressing concern by several parents, Resource and Referral Agencies, and providers. These individuals stressed the need for increased access to affordable, quality infant care, stating that two of the strongest barriers to infant care are limited provider training and teacher salary. Sheila Signer with Far West Laboratory Center's Child and Family Studies wrote that, "While we debate, discuss and grapple over limited resources, infants get older, with or without the care they need . . . As I visit infant/toddler programs in my search for locations to use in making training videos, I see many programs staffed by . . . poorly paid and demoralized staff. How can the infants and toddlers enrolled in these programs thrive?"

School-Age Care

Other presenters discussed the need for before and after-school programs. They lamented the number of latchkey children currently going home to empty houses, remaining unsupervised for several hours each day. Though some state and local recreation programs attempt to capture these children, children needing school-age care remain underserved. The YMCA, which is currently the largest private sector provider of school-age child care in the state, asked that planning include the needs of school-age children. They further stated that, "It is often the local communities that best understand these needs, and should therefore be given significant influence in prioritizing and utilizing child care funds, which in most cases will include school-age child care".

Early Childhood Education Programs

Good quality early childhood education programs drew repeated attention from presenters. Though the Head Start model was often used as a point of reference, concern was expressed that these programs also need to meet the full day care needs of parents. Also highlighted were the benefits of age group appropriate activities, programs capable of responding to the individual child, and recognition of the differing pace of individual development.

Getting children involved at younger ages was also encouraged. ECE was viewed as laying the foundation upon which future learning success could be built. Teresa Potter of the Santa Monica Child Care Task Force emphasized a need for further training in ECE beyond the current licensing requirements and succinctly questioned, ". . . Don't our children deserve more than the daily minimum requirement?"

Children with Exceptional Needs

Many presentations addressed the issue of care for exceptional needs children. Though they advocated increased funds for care for these children, they also emphasized the need to make these programs (as well as all child care and development programs) family centered. They noted the impact a special needs child can have upon the emotional and fiscal resources of a family. They emphasized how well-planned programs not only provide care and development opportunities for the child, but also provide opportunities for family growth and unity. Presenters viewed funding for exceptional needs as critical. As a representative of the Recreation Center for the Handicapped stated, "Our children and teens have severe and multiple handicaps . . . and require constant supervision. They do however have skills and abilities that allow them to play and recreate with their peers and in mainstreamed settings, provided adequate funding

is available for programs . . . Children with disabilities can become more independent through child development programs."

Abused, Neglected or At-Risk Children

For the abused, neglected or at-risk child, child care was seen as an essential preventive tool. "In the areas of prevention, quality child care offers a valuable support system for parents. It teaches them to value their child, offers lessons in discipline, child development, and socialization," said Helen Kleinberg of the Children's Services Commission.

Specialists spoke of the necessity of blending child welfare and child care services. Donna Smith of the Children's Institute International commented that, "Therapeutic center-based and family day care programs have proven effective in preserving and reuniting the highest risk families in the child welfare system. They have also proven effective in resolving potential abuse and neglect, and thereby preventing the necessity for public child welfare or juvenile court intervention." Others stressed the importance of child care and respite services for families of abused, neglected or at-risk children in order to preserve the family and reduce the foster care population.

Teen Parents

Teenage parents expressed a desire for expansion of child care services linked to the completion of their education. Noting that there are already several school district models available for these programs, they shared how they had been helped by the programs and expressed hope for the future because of their ability to complete their education. Dr. Anita Johnson of Culver Park High School commented, "There can be no higher use of funds than providing quality child care, on-site parenting training, and the opportunity for teen parents to break the welfare cycle by completing their education and moving on to self-sufficient futures."

Mimi Kover, a teacher with the Pregnant Minors and Teen Parent Program in the Gilroy Unified School District observed, "At Mt. Madonna High School alone, the dropout rate among teenage parents was lowered from 73% to 21% because of the prenatal classes, child development classes and the child care facility on campus. In reality, we're able to affect two generations of children at one time!"

Parental Choice -- Alternative Payment (AP) Programs as an Option

The Federal Block Grant Act contains language aimed at protecting parental choice in the selection of child care and development programs. Many

presenters stressed the point that state and local plans must also respect parental choice and provide for a broad spectrum of child care and development arrangements. As Ruth Freis of Resources for Family Development stated, "When you think of all the possibilities for how to use these new funds that are coming in to our State, I want you to think of the ripple effect of parent choice dollars and how the whole community benefits from a system that offers low-income families the opportunity to make real choices in their own behalf."

Many parents and providers commented that parental choice requires that there be an availability of good options. The role of consumer education, which is also a required component of the federal Child Care Block Grant, was discussed by several participants as significant to parental choice.

The current Alternative Payment (AP) Program was singled out by many presenters as an excellent prototype, and expansion of AP was recommended. Others, however, noted any well-structured vendor system would meet parental choice concerns. Speaking of the current AP programs, Tenna Land representing 4C's of Alameda County, reminded the panel, "California is in a unique situation to comply with this mandate (parental choice), since we have at least one agency in every county that already implements child care service through 'parental choice'."

Multilingual and Multicultural Programs

Bilingual care, in what participants identified as an increasingly heterogeneous, multicultural and multilinguistic society, was presented as a pressing need.

Dioncio Morales of the Mexican-American Opportunity Foundation observed there is a need for services that are sensitive to the cultural and linguistic roots of the children being served. Norman Yee, Director of the Wu Yee Resource and Referral Center, stated that ". . . Bicultural day care moves beyond ethnic holidays as a curriculum source . . . [It is] important to the development of the child's self-esteem that the day care be culturally familiar and supportive of the family's cultural values."

Geographic Equity

The issue of equitable distribution of funds to rural and urban areas was also raised. Rural areas pointed to shaky economies, pre-existing deficits in the breadth of services, and geographic dispersion of population as contributing to a pressing need for child care and development services. Shelley Miller of the Plumas County Child Care Task Force noted a full

range of child care needs are met by a limited range of child care options. "The lack of available care restricts parental choice and in some areas no care is available," stated Ms. Miller. "Access to existing care is further limited due to the lack of public transportation."

Kathleen Malaske-Samu, Los Angeles County Child Care Coordinator, observed that shifts from rural to suburban housing patterns also influence delivery of child care services. Highlighting this problem, Ms. Malaske-Samu said, "The uneven distribution of child care and family services throughout the county further complicates the issue of accessibility . . . Within the past decade, the northern portions of this county have been transformed from sparsely populated, rural areas to suburban communities. Lured by 'affordable' housing, families are finding that their piece of the American dream comes at the cost of long daily commutes to work and in the absence of desperately needed family support services."

Several participants urged that the planning and allocation process consider the often disproportionate need for subsidized care in inner cities and the lack of existing services. Some presenters further explained that for parental choice to be effective, there needed to be "good options".

Ties to Quality

It must be noted that none of the presenters advocating increased services were willing to sacrifice quality of care for increased child care "slots". There was lengthy discussion on recent proposals that would change existing regulations to allow a greater child to staff ratio. Further, there were several advocates who suggested the current ratio is too high to ensure quality, and cited the recent staff ratio study. They pointed to the current ratio as one of the potential contributors to staff burnout. Anne Broussard, Child Care Program Coordinator for the City of Pasadena reiterated the comments of many that addressed this issue when she said, "Let us not merely look at how many children can be served with these federal dollars -- but how well our children will be served."

Ties to Title IV-A Funding

The presentations on direct service also focused on the need for linkage between the block grant funding and the Title IV-A funding in order to assure integration of the new Federal programs with existing State programs. Those that addressed this issue stressed the need to provide care for the working poor through a seamless process. Several presenters suggested a sliding fee arrangement based upon income in the subsidized care area.

QUALITY OF CARE

Quality of care issues were frequently raised by those giving testimony. Though the quality issues generally centered around adult to child ratio, provider training, and compensation, other aspects of quality (such as pointing to the Head Start program as a model of quality) were also addressed. As Ms. Malaske-Samu put it, "It is essential that we design services which reflect what we know about the social, emotional and cognitive needs of young children, their families and caregivers."

Staff Training and Development

Caregiver Heidi Mattson of Florence Crittenton Services in San Francisco echoed the sentiments of the presenters discussing the need for support of staff training and development when she said, "Better training and the opportunity to upgrade my credentials can only bring positive results as to the quality of my time with the children and the overall success of the program at my center." Though training is available through community and state colleges, many of those testifying spoke of the difficulty of affording the training, arranging transportation to the training, and fitting the training in with their current work and family demands. The link between creating a personalized, age appropriate, and developmentally sound program for each child, and staff training was repeatedly cited. Providing support for staff in the form of tuition assistance, paid educational time-off, transportation assistance, and home study, were all mentioned as mechanisms addressing staff training needs.

Staff Salaries and Benefits

Over 40% of the participants addressed the issue of low salaries and shortage of qualified staff. Within this testimony, consistency of care and the ability of qualified caregivers to establish and maintain bonds with children were pointed to as the essential threads in weaving a quality program. Low salaries and lack of staff benefits were described as rending the fabric of quality care. Persons with graduate degrees in child development spoke of earning wages barely above the statutory minimum. Staff turn-over, problems in recruiting qualified staff, and staff burnout found common nexus in the low pay offered caregivers.

Persons who have directed their education toward preparing to work with children find they simply cannot afford to "pursue this dream". Several presenters with graduate degrees in child development emphatically stated low wages were forcing them to reevaluate their career choice and to explore employment options capable of providing them with a reasonable wage.

Those who provide the training to caregivers likewise expressed their love for the subject area while sharing the reservations they harbor with regard to encouraging eager young students to pursue a career in a profession with such low pay.

Addressing this issue in the context of infant care, Louis Torelli, an infant/toddler specialist, observed, "How do teacher salaries affect the quality of the early childhood program? . . . The major 'curriculum' component is developing trust in the world. The infant develops trust and security through their relationships with a small number of caring adults. What happens when that caring, well-trained adult, who the infant feels totally secure with, and, just as importantly, the parent feels secure with, needs to quit her job because the salary she earns is not enough to pay the bills?"

Susan Murray of the Santa Cruz Toddler Care Center, clearly defined the problem by saying, "The experts tell us that child care workers are the *key variable* effecting the social development of children in the child care setting. Research has shown that a worker's education and training . . . her 'involvement' with children . . . the amount of verbal interaction she has with children . . . and the quality of that interaction . . . are all crucial elements of day care quality and thus important determinants of a child's social development . . . Maintaining high quality child care means retaining trained and educated child care workers. Staff turnover is directly related to low salaries. Seen in this light, funding priority must be given to salary and benefit enhancement in order to ensure child care quality."

Joan Waller, Director of the Child Development Center at the College of the Canyons, adds, "I am personally concerned that many of the gifted and talented trained individuals who enter the field find that they are not able to support themselves and become statistics in the high turnover battle. I am reminded of the folk song *There's a hole in the bucket dear Liza*. We do a fine job of filling the bucket, but we need to fix the hole."

Quality Standards Must Be Maintained in Subsidized Programs

Presenters contended that although maintaining quality standards covers a broad spectrum of items ranging from staff credentials to health issues to facilities maintenance, their primary focus was on: (1) maintaining or lowering existing adult to child ratios; and (2) strengthening California's licensing standards. Maintaining an adequate number of children supervised by each adult, and ensuring that all adults supervising children are adequately trained, were viewed as critical to providing a quality program. Carollee Howes, Professor, UCLA, pointed to the importance of

maintaining a threshold of quality in child care, "Without enforcement of California's licensing standards on adult to child ratios and teacher training, the State of California will be in danger of harming the development of children in our State's child care system."

Participants reminded the panelists that California is currently completing the first staff ratio study, and that any decisions should await the results of the study due at the end of the year. The Legislature and Governor requested the statewide study because of concerns and questions regarding the effectiveness and adequacy of current staff ratios.

Resource and Referral Augmentation

The proven record of success established by Resource and Referral agencies in community outreach and education was expressed by a large number of participants. The bill itself provides for directing funds to these agencies. As was mentioned in the presentations, these agencies have been in the lead in providing consumer education, provider training and access to children's services.

As Kim Thomas-Dozier of Community Resources for Children in Napa explained, "Resource and Referral programs are the first option suggested by the legislation to fulfill this function (quality improvement and consumer education) . . . the proven track record of R&R's in the areas of provider training and technical assistance; and, consumer education must be acknowledged, and funded . . ."

Ron Garner, Vice President of the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, highlighting the diverse services these agencies provide, listed, ". . . child care advocacy, recruitment and support of child care providers and assist parents locate licensed care."

Parent Education and Training

Presenters spoke that in the matrix of issues surrounding child care and development, the role of parents was singularly the most important. Concerned, informed and involved parents were recognized as enhancing the quality of child care and development programs. The need for ensuring that parents are both informed consumers of services and informed participants in the delivery of those services was a touchstone of many presentations. The need for establishing a partnership with the parents based on a level playing field of knowledge, as well as a common interest in the child, was repeatedly given attention.

Other Concerns

Because of the large volume of testimonies, this summary represents what was said by a large number of oral and written presentations. It does not include some of the issues that were brought up by a relatively small number of testifiers, but are important and worth noting-- child care for the homeless, school breakfast programs, insuring children's adequate nutrition needs, high school parenting classes and more.

In addition, it should be noted that almost all the parents who presented written or oral testimony, represented Head Start programs. There were very few parents with children in nonsubsidized care and virtually no parents of children in subsidized care that presented testimony.

Future Hearings on State Plan

Information gathered from these two public hearings will have a significant impact on development of California's state plan. Once a draft of the plan is developed and circulated, the Advisory Committee with the support of the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, and in collaboration with the Secretary of Child Development and Education, and the Departments of Education and Social Services will hold two further public hearings. The purpose of these hearings will be to gather input on the state plan and its impact on implementation of the Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant. The future public hearings will be held this summer upon completion of the draft of the State Plan.

For Further Information

Over two hundred testimonies were either received by the Advisory Committee or presented during the hearings. Copies of the actual written testimonies are available for review at the Advisory Committee office, 915 Capitol Mall, Room 250, Sacramento, CA, and at the Sacramento Public Library, 536 Downtown Plaza, Sacramento.